

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6536

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 10535

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: VIGILANT CHURCH

REF: MANILA 10475

1. DESPITE REQUEST FROM PRESIDENT TO CALL OFF VIGIL, ARCHBISHOP SIN WENT THROUGH WITH IT AS SCHEDULED SUNDAY AFTERNOON. PRELIMINARY TO VIGIL, ARCHBISHOP'S LETTER CITED REFTTEL READ THROUGHOUT MANILA AREA DIOCESE. READING CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARCHBISHOP'S WISHES IN NON-INFLAMMATORY MANNER AND CROWD THAT PACKED MANILA CATHEDRAL TO OVERFLOW DURING VIGIL ACTED IN SIMILARLY RESTRAINED MANNER. ONLY AT ENTRY OF ARCHBISHOP AND WHEN HE FINISHED SERMON DID CROWD, IN UNUSUAL DEMONSTRATION OF FEELING, DEPART FROM RESTRAINT TO APPLAUD ARCHBISHOP (IT WAS ALSO HIS BIRTHDAY). VIGIL ENDED AT CONCLUSION OF MASS AND CROWD DISBANDED PEACEFULLY. POLICE AND PLAINCLOTHESMEN WERE ON HAND BUT NOT REQUIRED.

2. PRESS, APPARENTLY REFLECTING CHURCH DEMANDS ON GOVERNMENT, HAS CARRIED EXCERPTS FROM ARCHBISHOP'S DENIAL OF COOPERATION IN NOVITIATE RAID AND GENERALLY PROVIDED ACCURATE PICTURE OF GOVERNMENT EATING HUMBLE PIE. IT CONSTITUTES FRANKEST NEWS COVERAGE SINCE BEGINNING OF MARTIAL LAW. ONE PAPER REVERTED TO MARTIAL LAW DISSEMBLING STYLE SEPT 2 WHEN IT DESCRIBED VIGIL AS MASS FOR PEACE. NO DOUBT GOVERNMENT SINCERELY HOPES PEACE WITH CHURCH WILL FOLLOW.

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3. COMMENT: FACT GOVERNMENT PERMITTED VIGIL AND PUBLICLY

ADMITTED ERROR OVER NOVITIATE RAID HAS UNDOUBTEDLY GIVEN
SUBSTANTIAL BOOST TO CHURCH'S IMAGE AS MAJOR POLITICAL FACTOR
UNDER MARTIAL LAW REGIME. ARCHBISHOP'S REMARKABLY BOLD
LETTER TO HIS PEOPLE, COUPLED WITH HIS FIRM BUT RESTRAINED
MANNER HAS ALSO WON HIM NEW AND, WE SUSPECT, WIDESPREAD
RESPECT. WHETHER CHURCH WILL SEEK TO EXPLOIT ITS ADVANTAGES,
HOWEVER, SEEMS UNLIKELY. SEVEN NOVITIATE DETAINEES STILL
REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT HANDS, AND ARCHBISHOP DID STATE THAT
HE WANTED SPEEDY TRIAL FOR "ALL" DETAINEES (NOT JUST CHURCH-
MEN) BUT WE THINK CHURCH UNDER ARCHBISHOP'S DIRECTION WILL
ATTEMPT TO RETURN TO RELIGIOUS ROLE FOR TIME BEING WITH FULL
SUPPORT OF MORE CONSERVATIVE CHURCHMEN AND GOVERNMENT.
MAJOR QUESTION IS WHETHER GOVERNMENT HAS LEARNED ENOUGH
FROM THIS EPISODE TO PERMIT DAMPING DOWN OF FLAMES. IF
NOT, THE NEXT CONFRONTATION COULD BE LESS AMENABLE TO KID
GLOVE HANDLING.
SULLIVAN

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